

VZCZCXYZ0009
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRB #2604/01 3641610
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 301610Z DEC 05
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2385
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 3624
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2703
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 5297
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 2909
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3928
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 8533
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 1018

UNCLAS RABAT 002604

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS DISCUSS CHALLENGES
AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN MOROCCO

¶1. This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Five Moroccan human rights advocates, including a member of Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission, offered views on Morocco's accomplishments and shortcomings in the field of human rights during a December 14 roundtable for visiting DRL officer Martinez. With the final report of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (Instance Equitie et Reconciliation -- IER) just submitted to the Palace, discussion of the IER was a focus, with one activist arguing that the IER was an important step forward but only a partial one. While refraining from specific comment on the human rights situation in the Western Sahara, one participant rued that the Western Sahara conflict continued to eat up scarce Moroccan resources. The advocates agreed that most Moroccans did not have enough information about the US-Morocco Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to have an informed opinion, and consequently there was a negative undercurrent toward the FTA in Morocco. They identified illegal migration as an emerging area of concern for human rights. The activists were vague about areas in which US assistance could best support their efforts, though all welcomed it in spite of international debate on some current US human rights practices. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) On December 14, Polcouns hosted a roundtable discussion on human rights for visiting DRL officer Martinez to review the human rights landscape in Morocco. In addition to emboffs and DRL, present were:

-- Rachida Afilal, Leadership Feminin and MEPI-funded World Learning project implementer;

-- Dr. Abdelhay Moudden, Professor of Political Science, Director of the Center for Cross Cultural Learning, and member of the IER;

-- El Habib Belkouch, Director, Center for the Study of Human Rights and Democracy;

-- Abderahmane Bourhim, Association of the Amnesty International Groups of Morocco; and

-- Mohamed Abouhani, Helen Keller International (HKI)

Equity and Reconciliation: A Start

¶4. (SBU) After providing background on DRL-funded activities in Morocco, with DRL Martinez outlining the process for USG funding of human rights projects, Polcouns turned to Moudden for an update on the IER. Moudden said that the IER had completed its mandate and shut its doors following the submission of its final report and recommendations to the Palace on December 1. Moudden, clearly proud of the accomplishments of the IER, said he had every reason to believe that the recommendations in the report would be "accepted."

¶5. (SBU) Moudden emphasized that the IER was a commission, not a court, and was charged with telling the King the truth about past human rights abuses and recommending the types of compensation due to victims. He said the King would also decide about how much of the final report would be made public. (Note: Since the roundtable, the King has reportedly decreed that the entire report will be made public. End Note.)

¶6. (SBU) While the participants agreed with Moudden about the IER's mandate, the shortcomings of the mandate were discussed. Belkouch argued that some negative practices of the past continue, and members of the security forces frequently disregard the law. Bourhim echoed this sentiment, pointing out that human rights abuses committed under the reign of King Mohamed VI were not covered by the IER's mandate. While appreciating the work of the IER, Belkouch said the commission represented only one aspect of the human rights landscape in Morocco. Given that the IER's mandate is limited to human rights abuses that occurred between 1956 and 1999, how were abuses post-1999 to be handled, he asked?

Issues such as constitutional reform and separation of powers were outside the scope of the IER and remained urgent priorities for the country, in his view.

¶7. (SBU) Moudden said the completion of the IER's work should be regarded as a "first phase" of "equity and reconciliation in Morocco." In the second phase, the present, Moudden said human rights violations would continue, but they would be marginalized. That represented a major step forward, he felt.

¶8. (SBU) Belkouch agreed the commission's work allows Morocco to move into the future. Afilal believed the IER fulfilled the King's desire "to heal Morocco's wounds" and emphasized that the report is "about more than laying history to rest;" rather, she said, it served as a "guarantee for the future, a guarantee that human rights will be respected in Morocco."

¶9. (SBU) While not sure of details, Moudden said there could be a role in the coming year for outside donors to assist with the implementation of the recommendations -- for example, to turn the notorious Tazmamart prison into a cultural center, to establish a center for the study of human rights, or to assist with compensation for the victims of abuses.

Gaps between Words, Action, and Resources

¶10. (SBU) Belkouch stressed that, in spite of improvements in some areas, a gap remained between the state's openness to airing human rights concerns and its commitment to implementing changes that would minimize abuses in the future. He stressed there was further need for "training." Rachida Afilal agreed that passing new laws to protect human rights was important, but the application of the laws was the key. Belkouch said the majority of Moroccans, "the King among them," wanted a democratic state, but there had to be follow-through to bring it about; a lack of commitment to implementing change suggested that the commitment at the top

to ending human rights abuses was weaker than it appeared.

¶11. (SBU) Bourhim said he thought a glaring weakness in Morocco was the lack of a national human rights strategy for police. He was concerned about the extent of impunity of the security forces and the lack of judicial independence (Comment: All of these areas are identified in the mission's annual human rights report. End comment). He felt the GOM needed to devote more resources to protecting human rights. One example was the office of the ombudsman; by providing a channel for the people to air views and concerns directly to the Palace, it filled an important function, but no one knew about it (comment: despite its fancy website), so what good was it? The Moroccans were also somewhat critical of their own ranks, agreeing with Belkouch's comment that many human rights organizations in Morocco were "doing basically the same thing."

Watch Out for the Islamists

¶12. (SBU) Abouhani saw Morocco's Islamists as adversaries when it came to human rights. "Radical Muslims have the ear of the masses" in some parts of Morocco, he said, which he worried held back the social and economic development of the country. Literacy was an essential component of an improved human rights climate, he said. Because of widespread illiteracy in Morocco, Abouhani said human rights concerns were more strongly pushed by NGOs and the elite than the masses.

Human Rights and the National Development Initiative

¶13. (SBU) While not specifically a human rights initiative, all of the activists viewed the King's National Human Development Initiative (INDH) as a positive step. Afilal believed the INDH's emphasis on poverty reduction would have

a leavening effect on human rights. Abouhani noted that given the high rate of illiteracy and misery in the country, human rights could not become entrenched without social and economic development. Belkouch also linked human rights issues to political and economic development in the country.

FTA

¶14. (SBU) When asked about the potential impact of the US-Morocco Free Trade Agreement, which will take effect January 1, 2006, the participants were ambivalent about whether it represented a step forward for Morocco. Moudden said very little was known about the FTA in Morocco, and there was little discussion of the FTA beyond the elites. The reaction of "ordinary Moroccans," he said, is primarily negative, and there is a sense that Morocco is "not really ready" for an FTA with the US. "If you talk to small business owners in Morocco," Moudden said, "there is no understanding of the FTA." He chided the GOM for a "lack of communication" about the FTA and worried that Moroccans lacked the "savoir faire" to take advantage of the agreement. Other participants said there had been insufficient public debate about the FTA. That said, the participants welcomed any initiative that could provide jobs and promote economic development in Morocco, which they reiterated were an essential underpinning to protecting human rights.

Illegal Immigration

¶15. (SBU) Illegal migration to Morocco is creating new human rights pressures in the country, according to the participants. Without economic development and an increase in jobs, Morocco cannot absorb sub-Saharan migrants. At the

same time, the participants agreed that European countries, particularly Spain, cannot expect Morocco to police the migrants on its own. The migration problem was giving Morocco a bad name, they said, when Spain was also a human rights violator in forcibly repelling intending sub-Saharan migrants from their land border with Morocco. While illegal migration was not a new phenomenon for Morocco, Abouhani said "it just landed on us as a human rights issue." The participants felt Moroccan human rights organizations had little experience with the migration issue.

Opportunities for US Assistance

¶16. (SBU) The five participants, two of whom work for organizations that already receive US assistance, welcomed further US assistance to support human rights work in Morocco. They were unperturbed about reports dominating the press about alleged US torture of prisoners. They said the US had a great deal to offer "across the board." Abouhani said the US was still relatively unknown to Morocco, and as such Morocco was "dangerously dependent" on EU funding. He hoped the US viewed Morocco as a "fellow Atlantic country." Beyond a blanket welcome for US assistance, however, the participants did not specify priority areas, apart from "more hands-on training."

¶17. (SBU) DRL Martinez did not clear this cable.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley